



BECOMING AN EFFECTIVE PUBLIC SERVANT

Presenter: Allison Silberberg, Vice Mayor, Alexandria, Virginia

Public Management

Video Transcript

[TEXT: Young African Leaders Initiative
Online Training Series]

TEXT: Becoming an Effective Public Servant]

[TEXT: Allison Silberberg, Vice Mayor, Alexandria, Virginia]

I'm Allison Silberberg and I'm the vice mayor of Alexandria, Virginia, an historic town near the nation's capital, Washington D.C., and I'm going to talk about becoming an effective public servant.

I am honored to have been elected as the vice mayor of Alexandria, and I'm proud to serve my community. From the very beginning, I was determined to do an excellent job for all of the people. I realized that there would be a learning curve, but I was enthusiastic and determined to do as much as I could during my three-year term.

One of the first things I did after the election was to seek out the elders of the community — those who had been elected and had served, in public office, or on commissions or boards. I asked if they had any suggestions or ideas. I asked them what they thought and listened to everything they said — and what they didn't say. It has been extremely helpful to me to consult with all these voices.

But let me be clear. I stand on my own, and I make all my own decisions. I weigh all sides and then vote or act based upon my conscience. I also reach out to a number of local nonprofits and civic associations on a regular basis. I think it's important to work effectively with the city staff and ask for their opinions about issues of the day. It's important to listen carefully to all the different perspectives.

And I vote for what I believe is right for all the people of our beloved, historic city, Alexandria. I'm elected for my judgment. So there will be times when many in the community have one perspective, while others have a different opinion. While there will be times when some will not agree with a particular vote I make, I'm sure that there will be many other occasions where we will have common ground. I believe that we must vote for what is right and for what is just for the common good and for the long-term interests of our citizens and the generations to come.

Being effective means being an excellent listener. One way for me to hear what our citizens have to say is by inviting them to my monthly coffee, which is called "Council on Your Corner." All are welcome to attend. It's a casual event on a Saturday morning. We sit in a circle so I can see and hear everyone. People love it because they can share their thoughts and concerns, and they know that they are heard. Everyone feels that they are among friends and neighbors who want to help each other. People get to know one another in the process. And people are working together regardless of political party.





Another aspect to being a public leader is civic engagement. Not everyone can give 20 hours a week, or even five hours. But many can give an hour a weekend and get involved in something larger than themselves. What I have found is that I am basically creating opportunities for people to get involved and join me in this effort to make our city a better place to live for everyone.

If there is a proposal for a big change in our city government or regarding a piece of property, there is often a great deal of debate. Debate is a sign of a strong democracy. It's good for people with different opinions to come to the table and discuss their views. It's important to respect all opinions and allow the debate to happen without reprisals, and to keep an open mind. It's a great honor to serve and I give it everything I have. The question always in my mind, when faced with a decision, is: What is in the best interest of our people and our beloved, historic city? That is what being an effective public servant is all about.

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